

NIBBANA



N I B B A N A

BY VAPPA THERA.

Manussabhūto sambuddho

Vanā nibbānam āgato

“The Buddha, the Enlightened one,

Born on this earth, a mortal man

From vanity and greed has passed

To Nirvāna free from vanity.”

Buddhism is unique and unrivalled in the world.

For no other religion shows such a lofty and supreme goal as Nirvāna.

In no other system of thought can we find the teaching of such a noble truth as the teaching of “Anatta”, *i.e.*, that there nowhere can be found a “Self”. No system of thought can lay any claim to kinship with the Dhamma.

Buddhism is the most profound and comprehensive teaching of how to develop morality, concentration and wisdom ; it is the philosophy of holiness!

Christ’s teaching requires blind belief in him and his heavenly father, whereas the Buddha says:—

“Do not go merely by hearsay or tradition, not by what has been handed down from olden times, not by rumours, not by mere reasoning and logical deductions, not by outward appearances, not by cherished opinions and speculations, not by mere possibilities, and do not believe merely because I am your master.

“But, when you yourself have seen that a thing is bad and blameable and leads to harm and suffering, then you should reject it.

“And when you see that a thing is good and blameless and leads to blessing and welfare, then you ought to do such a thing.”

And in the Dhammapada it is said:

“We ourselves must walk the path,
Buddhas do merely teach the way.”

Sober truth and sober understanding characterize Buddhism. Already the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche proves this absolute soberness and clearness when he says: “Buddhism is a hundred times more realistic than Christianity. It has entered upon the inheritance of objectivity and coldly putting problems. It came to life after several hundred years of philosophical development. The notion “God” is done away with as soon as it appears. Prayer is out of the question. So is asceticism. No categorical imperative. No coercion at all, not even within the monastic order. Hence it challenges to fight against nothing so impressively as against the feeling of revengefulness, animosity and resentment.”

The Blessed One attained Enlightenment and Nibbāna, visible in this present life, at the age of thirty-five, and he spent the remaining forty-five years of his life in actively preaching and proclaiming the Dhamma. At Isipatana in the deer-park at Benares he had established that Supreme Kingdom of Truth which none can overthrow—neither ascetic nor priest, nor heavenly being, nor evil spirit, nor god, nor anyone whosoever in all the world,—by proclaiming, pointing out, making known, establishing, unveiling, explaining and making evident the Four Noble Truths.

What are these Four Noble Truths?

“They are the Noble Truth of Suffering, the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering, the Noble Truth of the

Extinction of Suffering and the Noble Truth of the Path that leads to the Extinction of Suffering."

These Truths make evident that nowhere, neither in the macrocosm nor in the microcosm, is there to be found an unconditioned absolute Ego-entity or Self, and that all we know is that life consists in an ever changing process of corporeality, feelings, consisting in the irresistible change of mental, moral and material phenomena, and that even behind these things there is no "Ding an sich", no "thing in itself".

And the Blessed One said, "As long, Disciples, as the absolutely true knowledge and insight as regards these Four Noble Truths were not quite clear in me, so long was I not sure whether I had won to that supreme Enlightenment which is unsurpassed in all the world with its heavenly beings, evil spirits and gods, amongst all the hosts of ascetics and priests, heavenly beings and men. But as soon as the absolutely true knowledge and insight as regards these Four Noble Truths had become perfectly clear in me, there arose in me the assurance that I had won to that supreme Enlightenment unsurpassed.

"And I discovered that profound truth, so difficult to understand, tranquillizing and sublime, which is not to be gained by mere reasoning nor conceivable to ordinary knowledge but visible and comprehensible only to the wise.

"The world, however, is given to pleasure, delighted with pleasure, enchanted with pleasure. Verily, such beings will hardly understand the law of conditionality, the Dependent Origination (Paticca-samuppāda) of every thing; incomprehensible to them will also be the end of all formations, the forsaking of every substratum of rebirth, the fading away of craving, detachment, extinction, Nibbāna.

“Yet there are beings whose eyes are only a little covered with dust: they will understand the truth.”

Nibbāna, in Sanskrit Nirvāna, lit. “the ceasing to blow, the going out” (of fire etc.) is composed of the prefix “nir” meaning “out” and √vā: to blow. The commentary however explains it as: nir + vana (in old High German *vera*, modern German *Wahn*) free from desire, delusion.

Nibbāna is also called Cessation, Extinction of human passion, Peace, Purity, Bliss, Calm, Happiness, the Formless, the Infinite, the Imperishable, the External, the Supreme, the Transcendent, the Deathless state, the state free from Suffering, the Best of Things, the Void, the Unconditioned, the Unborn, the Unoriginated, Uncreated, Unformed.

Nibbāna is very often compared with the state of a lamp being blown out. In the Khuddaka Patha 10 it is said: “*Nibbanti dhīrā yathāyam padīpo*,” i.e., “the wise men become extinguished like this lamp”.

Whatever may be the literal meaning of the term Nibbāna, the Buddha says: “*Rāgakkhayo, Dosakkhayo, Mohakkhayo, idam vuccati Nibbānam*” = the extinction of greed, anger and delusion, this indeed is called Nibbāna.

The Noble Disciple who has attained Nibbāna, represents the embodiment of a perfectly happy life, resulting from the possession of the most profound and comprehensive knowledge and power of reflection. He represents the realization of a perfect moral and virtuous life.

The Bhikkhu who has put off greed, anger and delusion, and is rich in wisdom, has, already here on this earth, attained deliverance from death, attained immortality, Nibbāna.

All conceptions, all beliefs, all knowledge, all revelations, all powers, all glory, cannot explain what is inexplicable. What is inexplicable, and what all those

mortals who return to dust, would like to explain, to inquire, to investigate and to press into the bounds of common sense, all this the Blessed One did not explain.

And why did the Holy One not explain this?

Because it is not leading to detachment, cessation, and overcoming of bodily form, feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness, therefore the Blessed One did not explain.

Verily, in Nibbāna speech becomes silent, and the silence becomes Peace which no discord of thinking and reflection can disturb.

“Dont measure the unmeasurable,
With thinking you will never solve,
What lies beyond all thinking power.
Who asks about it, surely errs,
So also he, who answers him.
It's only he that solves the problem
Who lives in holy solitude
And strives along the Holy Path!
Speech is of Time, but Silence of Eternity!”

But, Unreasonable silence is folly!

We are beings of our own experience and convictions. Each being has come to be by its own blind impulses ; each one, in its own field of experience, has learned the lesson of life in its own way. Experience has been his great teacher. Each one is responsible to himself and no one can blame another for what he is and what he has become.

There is no external object either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.

On ignorance (avijjā) and craving (tanhā) depends our existence, on not knowing that at the bottom of all only “unsatisfactoriness” is to be found.

Thus the root-condition of all sorrow and evil is ignorance. When this condition is controlled, sense contact will no longer lead to misconception. When misconception no longer arises in the mind, all craving will cease, and with the extinction of all craving we will be freed from all morbid cleaving and indulgence in sensual pleasure, and hence from all karma and rebirth, from decay, disease, death, sorrow, lamentations, pain, grief and despair.

It is therefore clear that the fate, the destiny of each one of us, rests in our own hands. For our present existence (represented by consciousness) depends on our karma-formations (*sankhāra-karma*) in former existences, and all our future birth and existence depends on our past and present karma formations.

Our last thought-moment before death, however, may reverse the destiny for a short time so that a man with murderous tendencies, at least temporarily, may be reborn in heaven, and a righteous man in hell.

“Life’s suffering is life’s own doing!”

Sankhārā paramā dukkhā—

Nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ

Karma is the greatest evil—

Nibbāna is the highest bliss.

If life is associated with suffering, no being has a right to blame another for what he is and what he has become. He who knows the nature of life will not be afraid of suffering, he will bear its ills nobly as he knows that none can turn aside the Law of nature.

Therefore the Buddha says: “Develop the idea on death, saying to yourselves: Uncertain is my life. Certain is my death. I shall surely die. Death will be the termination of my life. Life is unstable. Death is sure.” The world is a bubble and the life of men less than a span.

Shadows we are and like shadows we depart. Worldly men fear death as children fear to go in the dark. "Those who have not developed the idea on death will fear and tremble when their last hour comes, and will die screaming screams of terror, even as a man, who, having no stick with him, on seeing a poisonous snake, is stricken with fear."

"But he who has practiced the idea on death, will have no fear and will not tremble when his last hour comes. He will be like a steadfast man, who, on seeing a poisonous snake, even afar off, takes it up with a stick and throws it away."

And he whose life is in harmony with the Holy Eightfold Path, *i.e.*,—Right Understanding, Right Mindedness, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Living, Right Effort, Right Attentiveness and Right Concentration—his sympathies are universal, his compassion is so far reaching that it excludes none, not even those who are hating and despising him.

"Just as a mother, at the risk of her own life, protects her only child," so does he who has attained Nibbāna, cultivate loving kindness beyond measure, cherishing love and compassion to all living beings, free from any feeling of making distinctions or showing preferences.

He remains steadfast in his mind, and this state of mind is the best in the world.

"Being still in the world, though not of the world."

That unshakable deliverance of the heart, that incomparable security, that blissful, pure and perfect state of mind cannot be obtained by wishing and willing, but only by getting rid of all worldly and heavenly desires, of all inclinations to the vain glory of I and mine. This, however, cannot be realized in a state of weak-mindedness, but

only through the fullest development of will-power, connected with the Holy Eightfold Path.

Says the Buddha:

“May rather skin, sinews and bones wither away, may the flesh and blood of my body dry up: I shall not give up my effort, so long as I have not attained whatever is attainable by manly perseverance, by manly energy, by manly endeavour.”

“Yad aniccaṃ taṃ nālaṃ abhiñanditum nālaṃ abhivaditum, nālaṃ ajjhositun ti.”

Whatever is transient is not worth rejoicing at, is not worthy of our regard, not worthy of our attachment.

It is only by the application of concentrated energy that the complete self-possession and mastery of mind may become possible of achievement.

Thus only can man come to peace ; thus only can he reach that which is neither annihilation nor continuance, neither life nor death.

The bliss of Nibbāna is within our grasp if we accept our responsibilities, find our possibilities and use our opportunities.

The difference between the wise man and the fool is that the wise man seizes his opportunities, and the fool misses them.

Further, Nibbāna may be comprehended in the following three ways.

(1) by faith (*saddheyya-siddhi*) in the statements of those who have experienced it ;

(2) by conclusion (*anumeyya-siddhi*).

(3) by realizing it (*paccakkha-siddhi*) in one of the four stages of the Path of Holiness: the path of the “stream-winner (sotapanna), of the “Once—returner” (sakadāgāmin)

of the Non-returner (anāgāmin) and of the perfectly "Holy One", the Arahāt.

Only after realizing that all forms of existence are subject to suffering, hence unsatisfactory, we may fully come to see the value of Nibbāna face to face.

Nibbāna, i.e., the freedom from suffering can only be realized by the annihilation of craving for sensual enjoyment and by the annihilation of craving for eternal existence.

That Nibbāna can be realized already during life time is taught beyond all doubt. It is said "*Diṭṭheva dhamme parinibbuto*:"

"Already in this present life he has attained Nibbāna."

There are many who believe that Nibbāna meant annihilation. "Truly, in some regard one may rightly say that the Holy One teaches annihilation, and that he trains his disciples therein, for he teaches annihilation of greed, anger and delusion, as well as of the manifold evil and demeritorious things".

"*Pubbe c'aham bhikkhave, etarahi ca dukkhan c'eva paññāpemi, dukkhassa ca nirodham*:"—

"Both things, O Monks, do I make known unto you, now as before: "Suffering as well as deliverance from suffering."

This is expressed in the fundamental teaching of the Four Noble Truths which constitute the whole Dhamma.

The release from suffering, the release from saṃsāra, is the supreme goal in Buddhism. Complete fading away and extinction of craving, its forsaking and giving up, the liberation and detachment from it: that brings about the extinction of suffering.

Bhavanirodho nibbānam! "Extinction of the process of becoming: that is Nibbāna."

And released from sensual craving, released from craving for existence, one does not return, does not enter again into existence.

If so, is it not really foolish of the so-called Mahayanists to say, "I will not enter Nibbāna before all mankind has reached it." That really means that one should with all his might hinder *tanhā*, together with all its evil accompaniments, to disappear, and keep *tanhā* going on, which really would be immoral and opposed to the Buddha's teaching.

A seed will grow under the necessary conditions and never will wait till other seeds grow. We cannot command nature, only we can help her, by putting the necessary conditions for her work.

If one completes the Holy Eightfold Path and gets rid of craving (*tanhā*), then one has attained Nibbāna and no one can put him back from the state already attained. For, if there is no more craving (*tanhā*), there is Nibbāna.

"All that we know is that the entire phenomenal world depends wholly upon the six senses, together with all its suffering and that all this is not a mere play of blind chance, but has an existence that is dependent upon conditions and that, precisely with the removal of these conditions, those things that have arisen in dependence upon them must perforce disappear and cease to be.

According to Buddhist teaching, rebirth is only a result of selfish craving and clinging for existence, existing in the so-called dying individual.

There does not exist, in the highest sense, any "being" who is born, acts, enjoys, suffers, dies, or is reborn to die again, but there is only birth, action, enjoyment, suffering, decay and death of corporeal and mental phenomena. There are only conditioned and ever changing phenomena,

no permanent entities! Therefore it is said in the Visuddhi Magga.

“Kammassa kārako n’atthi
Vipākassa ca vedako.
Suddhadhammā pavattanti,
Ev’etaṃ sammadassanaṃ.

No doer of the deeds is found,
No one who ever reaps their fruits,
Empty phenomena roll on,
This view alone is right and true.

Na h’ettha devo brahmā vā,
Samsārass’ atthi kārako,
Suddhadhammā pavattanti,
Hetusambhārapaccayā ti.

No god, no Brahma, can be found,
No maker of this wheel of life,
Empty phenomena roll on,
Dependent on conditions all.

(VISUDDHI XIX)

Every being born into the universe is subject to rebirth everywhere and Death is followed by rebirth in a new existence which may be either one of misery or of temporary happiness.

One may be reborn in the world of devas, the world of men, the brute creation, the preta world, the hell or in the world of demons.

The insect crushed beneath the foot may be reborn as a radiant angel or by the potent force of kamma, an angel may at death be hurled into the nethermost hell.

But how is this possible?

“Inconceivable is the beginning of this saṃsāra, not to be discovered a first beginning of beings who, obstructed by ignorance and ensnared by craving, are hurrying and hastening through this round of rebirths”.

“All formations are “transient” (anicca), all formations are “subject to suffering” (dukkha), all things are “without an Ego-entity” (anatta). Form is transient, feeling is transient, perception is transient, mental formations are transient, consciousness is transient.

“And of that which is transient and subject to suffering and change, one cannot rightly say: “This belongs to me ; this am I ; this is my Ego.”

“Therefore, whatever there be of bodily form, of feelings, perceptions, mental formations or consciousness, whether one’s own or external, whether gross or subtle, lofty or low, far or near, one should understand according to reality and true wisdom: “This does not belong to me ; this am I not ; this is not my ego.”

Suppose a man who can see, beholds the many bubbles on the Ganges as they are driving along, and he should watch them and carefully examine them. After carefully examining them, they will appear to him as empty, unreal and unsubstantial. In exactly the same way does the monk behold all the bodily forms, feelings, perceptions, mental formations and states of consciousness-whether they be of the past, present or future, far or near.

And he watches them and examines them carefully, and after carefully examining them, they appear to him as empty, void and without an ego.

And the Buddha says: “Whoso delights in bodily form, or feelings, or perceptions, or mental formations, or

consciousness, he delights in suffering ; whoso delights in suffering will not be freed from suffering. Thus I say."

"How can you find delight and mirth,
Where there is burning without end?
In deepest darkness you are wrapt!
Why do you not seek for the light?"

"Did you never see in the world a man or a woman 80, 90 or 100 years old, frail, crooked as a gable-roof, bent down, supported on a staff, with tottering steps, infirm, youth long since fled, with fallen teeth, grey and scanty hair, or bald-headed, wrinkled, with blotched limbs? And did the thought never come to you that you also are subject to decay, that you cannot escape it?"

"Did you never see in this world a man or a woman, who, being sick, afflicted and grievously ill, and wallowing in their own filth, were lifted up by some people and put to bed by others? And did the thought never come to you that you also are subject to disease, that you cannot escape it?"

"Did you never see in the world the corpse of a man or a woman, one or two or three days after death, swollen up, blue-black in colour, and full of corruption?"

And did the thought never come to you that you also are subject to death, that you cannot escape it?

"Inconceivable is the beginning of this Samsāra, not to be discovered a first beginning of beings who, obstructed by ignorance and ensnared by craving, are hurrying and hastening through this round of rebirths.

"Which do you think is more: the flood of tears with weeping and wailing you have shed upon this long way—hurrying and hastening through this round of rebirths, united to the undesired, separated from the desired—this or the waters of the four oceans?"

“Long time have you suffered the death of father and mother, of sons, daughters, brothers and sisters. And whilst you were thus suffering, you have verily shed more tears upon this long way than there is water in the four oceans.

“Which do you think is more: the streams of blood that, through your being beheaded, have flowed upon this long way,—this, or the waters in the four oceans?

Long time have you been caught as dacoits or highwaymen or adulterers; and through your being beheaded, verily, more blood has flowed upon this long way than there is water in the four oceans.

But how is this possible?

“Inconceivable is the beginning of this Samsāra, not to be discovered a first beginning of beings, who, obstructed by ignorance and ensnared by craving, are hurrying and hastening through this round of rebirths.

“And thus have you long time undergone suffering, undergone torment, undergone misfortune and filled the graveyards full, verily, long enough to be dissatisfied with all forms of existence, long enough to turn away and free yourself from them all.”

“Be it in the past, present or future: whosoever of the monks or priests regards the delightful and pleasurable things in the world as impermanent (*anicca*), miserable (*dukkha*), and without an ego (*anattā*), as a disease and sorrow, it is he who overcomes craving.

“And released from Sensual Craving, released from the Craving for Existence, he does not return, does not enter again into existence.

“For through the total fading away and extinction of “Craving” (*tanhā*), “Clinging to Existence” (*upādāna*) is extinguished; through the extinction of the clinging to existence, the “Process of Becoming” (*bhava*) is extin-

guished ; through the extinction of the "Process of Becoming" (Action) Rebirth (jāti) is extinguished, through the extinction of rebirth, decay and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair are extinguished. Thus comes about the extinction of this whole mass of suffering.

"Hence the annihilation, cessation and overcoming of bodily form, feeling, perception, karma-formations and consciousness: this is the extinction of suffering, the end of disease, the overcoming of old age or death.

"And for a disciple thus freed, in whose heart dwells peace, there is nothing to be added to what has been done, and naught more remains for him to do. Just as a rock of one solid mass remains unshaken by the wind, even so neither forms, nor sounds, nor odours, nor tastes, nor contacts of any kind, neither the desired nor the undesired, can cause such a one to waver. Steadfast is his mind, gained is deliverance."

"Verily, there is a realm where there is neither the solid, nor the liquid, neither heat nor motion, neither this world nor any other world, neither sun nor moon.

"This I call neither arising nor passing away, neither standing still, nor being born, nor dying. There is neither foothold, nor development, nor any basis. This is the end of suffering.

"There is an Unborn, Unoriginated, Uncreated, Unformed. If there were not this Unborn, Unoriginated, Uncreated, Unformed, escape from the world of the born, the originated, the created, the formed, would not be possible.

"But since there is an Unborn, Unoriginated, Uncreated, Unformed, therefore is escape possible from the world of the born, the originated, the created, the formed."

“The learned and noble disciple, however, who has regard for holy men, knows the teaching of holy men, is well trained in the noble doctrine, he understands what is worthy of consideration, and what is unworthy of consideration. And knowing this, he considers the worthy and not the unworthy. What Suffering is, he wisely considers. What the Origin of suffering is, he wisely considers. What the Extinction of suffering is, he wisely considers. What the Path is that leads to the extinction of suffering, he wisely considers.

“And by considering thus, three fetters vanish, namely: “Self-illusion, Scepticism and Attachment to mere Rule and Ritual.”

“And those disciples in whom these three fetters have vanished, they all have “entered the Stream” (sotāpanna), have forever escaped the states of woe, and are assured of final enlightenment.

“More than any earthly power,
More than all the joys of heaven,
More than rule o’er all the world,
Is the Entrance to the Stream.”

“And verily, those who are filled with unshaken faith towards me, all those have entered the stream.”

“However, through the fading away of delusion, through the arising of Wisdom, through the extinction of craving, no future rebirth takes place again.

“For, the actions which are not done out of greed, anger and delusion, which have not sprung from them, which have not their source and origin there: such actions are, through the absence of greed, anger and delusion, abandoned, rooted out, like a palm tree torn out of the soil, destroyed, and not liable to spring up again.

"In this respect one may say of me, that I teach annihilation, that I propound my doctrine for the purpose of annihilation, and that I herein train my disciples. For certainly, I teach annihilation, the annihilation of greed, anger and delusion, as well as of the manifold evil and demeritorious things.

"One may, through the "Cessation of Passion" come to know for oneself, even in this life, the stainless deliverance of the mind, the deliverance through wisdom."

Thus wisdom and right understanding are the Alpha and Omega of the entire teaching of the Buddha.

Nyanatiloka Thera says: "If I were asked what the "conditio sine quâ non" was for a real and thorough understanding of the Buddha's Teaching of The Four Noble Truths, I should have to say:

Penetration of the phenomenality and impersonality of all forms of existence, of the unreality of any ego-entity, of the illusions of "I" and "Mine", in short the Truth of Anatta or 'non-self'."

"First we have to penetrate this liberating truth of Anatta because this is the central and unique doctrine of Buddhism. We have to comprehend that there exists, in reality, only this process of ever arising and passing away of bodily and mental phenomena going by the conventional but ambiguous name "I", "You", "Man", "Woman", "Child" etc. He who does not understand in such a way the noble Truth of Anatta such a one will not understand the First Noble Truth of Suffering rightly, he will think that the Buddha taught that it is "He", his imagined "Ego" that is subject to suffering.

"He will not understand the Second Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering rightly, he will think that the Buddha taught that it is "He", his imagined "Ego", that

does the deeds, and he will think that after death, the so-called Ego reaps their fruits.

“He will not understand The Third Noble Truth of the Extinction of Suffering rightly, because he will think that the Buddha taught that it is “He”, his imagined “Ego” that will enter Nibbāna.

“He will not understand the Fourth Noble Truth of the Path leading to the Extinction of Suffering rightly because he will think that the Buddha taught that it is “He”, his imagined “Ego” that is practising the Holy Eightfold Path. But:

“Mere suffering is, any sufferer cannot be found,
The deeds exist, but no performer of the deeds,
Nirvana is, but not the man that enters it,
The Path is, but no wanderer is to be seen.

“No doer of the deeds is found,
No one who ever reaps their fruits,
Empty phenomena roll on,
This view alone is true and right.”—

No c’assa, no ca me siyā, na bhavissati, na me bhavissati, yad atthi yaṃ bhūtaṃ taṃ pajahāmī’ti evaṃ upekkham paṭilabhati, i.e., “May it not be! May it not belong to me! It will not be! It will not belong to me! What there exists, and what there has become, I am giving it up”, thus he attains equanimity (Majjhima 106).

Whenever I put the question, “Who made the five Khandhas, or five groups of existence”, I seldom get a right answer. Now, let it be said that the five groups of bodily and mental phenomena, correctly speaking, have been put together by the Buddha in order to show the “Anatta-doctrine”, the central and unique teaching of Buddhism.

All those bodily forms, feelings, perceptions, mental-formations and states of consciousness which the Buddha has classified and grouped into the five groups are only of momentary duration, existing no longer than a flash of lightning.

One never gets a right understanding of the five groups of existence, if one thinks of them as something compact, whereas in reality they are only fleeting phenomena changing as quickly as lightning.

The five groups are merely a classification made by the Buddha but have, as such, i.e., as groups, no real existence. If there arises, e.g., a joyful feeling, there cannot arise at the very same moment a sorrowful feeling; thus at any given moment only single representatives of these groups may be present, never any group as a whole. Hence it is impossible that a group of feelings, or perceptions, or states of consciousness may arise at one and the same time.

The four mental groups are never existing separately. "And it is impossible that anyone can explain the passing out of one existence and the entering into a new existence or the growth, increase and development of consciousness, independently of bodily form, feeling, perception and mental-formations.

Each state of consciousness is always connected with some of the 50 mental Formations as explained in the "Guide through Abhidhamma Piṭaka" by my teacher, the Ven. Nyanatiloka.

In every state of consciousness are at least five formations present, i.e., impression (phassa), will (cetanā), attention (manasikāra), concentration (cittass'ekaggatā) and vitality (jivit'indriya).

To the learned and noble disciple, who is penetrating these five Khandhas of Existence as transitory, subject to

suffering and without any Ego, there will in his mind arise that ultramundane faculty which says: "I shall come to know what is still unknown to me"—(*anaññātan-ñassāmit' indriya*), namely the knowledge that appears at the entrance into Sotapanna state.

Through not understanding the nature of the five groups of existence, one gets possessed of manifold wrong views, and it becomes one's conviction and firm belief, "I have an Ego", or "I have no Ego"; or "With the Ego I perceive the Ego" or "With that which is no Ego I perceive the Ego" or "With the Ego I perceive that which is no Ego". Or one falls into the following view: "This my Ego, which can think and feel, and which, now here, now there, experiences the fruit of good and evil deeds—this my Ego is permanent, stable, eternal, not subject to change and will thus eternally remain the same."

"But, the noble disciple who understands the five Khandhas as impermanent, subject to change and suffering, as not remaining in two successive moments the same, he will penetrate that liberating truth of "Anatta", the very root of all unselfishness, leading to Nibbāna.

*"Sabbe dhammā anattā'ti
Yadā paññāya passati
Atha nibbindati dukkhe
Esa maggo visuddhiyā*

'Nowhere can there be found a Self':
Who wisely perceives this truth,
He turns away from misery.
'This is the path to purity.'

But the process by which the Buddha arrived at this "Holy Wisdom" is of the greatest importance, for therein is found the key to the solution of the problem of Nibbāna—therein is contained the very way by which any man who

so wishes and wills, can realize this same state of “purifying wisdom”.

If there would exist in this individual process of existence an unchangeable, immutable Self or Ego, it could not be influenced by conduct and become better, and thus there would be no use in leading a holy life.

In as much as in the whole universe nothing permanent is to be found, how can we speak of any immutable, unchanging Self?

Not by prayers, nor asceticism, nor by outward ceremonies, rites and rituals, nor by dialectical skill, was that “Holy Wisdom” secured ; but only in renouncing all worldly and heavenly desires, all hopes and beliefs in an eternal Being, all inclinations to the vainglory of “I” and “Mine”. Thus only can true understanding and intuition be acquired.

“Just as the elephant hunter drives a huge stake into the ground and chains the wild elephant to it by the neck in order to drive out of him his wonted forest ways and his forest unruliness, obstinacy and violence and to accustom him to the environment of the village and teach him such good behaviour as is required amongst men ; in like manner also has the Noble Disciple to fix his mind firmly to these four fundamentals of attentiveness (body, feeling, mind and mental states), so that he may drive out of himself his wonted worldly ways and wishes, his worldly unruliness, obstinacy and violence and so win and realise Nibbāna.”

There are two kinds of Disciples, namely: the Sikkhavi-passaka, the “Dry-visioned One” and the Samatha-Yānaka, or “one who has taken tranquillity (samatha) as his vehicle (yāna).

The Sikkhavi-passaka has realised one or another of the Four Ultramundane Paths without having ever attained the Trances. Merely by the necessary insight into the

transitoriness, unsatisfactoriness and Egolessness of corporeal and mental phenomena, he attains the four Paths to Nirvāna. This class of disciple is devoid of supernormal powers attributed to the other class, their passions are, as it were, "dried up by Insight."

Vipassanā or Insight is, however, for everyone the absolutely necessary condition to enter into the Path of the Sotapanna, Sakadāgāmin, Anāgāmin and Arahāt.

This degree of "Insight" again may be attained only during Neighbourhood—Concentration (upacāra-samādhi), not during the Jhānas.

The Samathayānaka possesses various supernormal powers, as it is said:

"With the "Heavenly Eye", the purified, the super-human, he may see beings vanish and reappear, the base and the noble, the beautiful and the ugly, the happy and the unfortunate; he may perceive how beings are reborn according to their deeds.

With the "Heavenly Ear," the purified, the super-human, he may hear both kinds of sounds, the heavenly and the earthly, the distant and the near.

"With the mind he may obtain 'Insight into the Hearts of other Beings.' He may obtain remembrance of many previous Births".

We may also speak of two aspects of Nibbāna namely: "Kilesa-parinibbāna" or "Upādisesa-nibbāna" which is the extinction of human passion, and "Khandha parinibbāna, or Anupādisesa-nibbāna" which is the extinction of the five khandha-process. This takes place at the death of the Arahāt.

Nibbāna is beyond consciousness, beyond every form of existence. The bliss of the jhānas, and especially of the 'suspension of consciousness' and feeling called "nirodha-samāpatti," are sometimes compared with the bliss of Nibbāna.

It is certain that Nibbāna is the “Summum bonum,” the greatest good that man can experience in this life itself.

In Abhidhanappadipikā Nibbāna is called:

Accanta—The Everlasting,
 Akata—The Unmade,
 Ananta—The Endless,
 Apalokita—The Undestructible,
 Panīta—The Sublime,
 Sarana—The Refuge,
 Khema—The Safety,
 Tāna—The Shelter,
 Lena—The Retreat,
 Parāyana—The Goal,
 Siva—The Bliss,
 Nipuna—The Profound,
 Sacca—The Truth,
 Dukkha-khaya—The cessation of misery,
 Anāsa—The freedom from longing,
 Sududdasa—That which is difficult to grasp,
 Asankhata—The Uncreated,
 Para—The further Shore,
 Pāra—The Beyond,
 Mokka—The Deliverance,
 Nirodha—The Extinction,
 Anidassana—The Unperceptible,
 Nibbāna—The Extinction of Craving,
 Dhuva—The Permanent,
 Japa—The Prayed for,
 Avyāpajja—The Unoppressedness,
 Vivatta—The standstill of the cycle of existence,
 Kevala—The Absolute,
 Anitika—The Undistressed,
 Anālaya—The Detached,
 Pada—The Law,

Accuta—The Deathless,
 Akkhara—The Lasting,
 Vimutta—The Release,
 Vimutti—The Liberation,
 Apavagga—The total Completion,
 Virāga—The Dispassionate,
 Yogakkhema—The Peace from Bondage,
 Santi—The Stillness,
 Visuddhi—The Purity,
 Asankhata—The Uncaused,
 Suddhi—The Pure,
 Nibbuta—The Allayment.

These are the names given to Nibbāna by the Buddha in various discourses. By this it becomes evident that Nibbana cannot be compared to anything which comes within the reach of our senses.

Thus let it be the aim of everyone to reach this state where there reigns eternal Peace, Bliss and Silence.

. Nibbāna is visible to the mind of those who enter the Path of the Sotapanna, Sakadāgāmin, Anāgāmin and Arahāt, at the moment of deep insight into the Egolessness, Emptiness and misery of all Existence.

And this moment is reached by the Holy Eight-fold Path.

Thus Nibbāna is perceivable by an absolutely pure and holy mind.

Just as a blind man does not understand what light is, or as the sun cannot be seen when there are clouds, just so the mind clouded by greed, anger and delusion will not be able to perceive the reality of Nibbāna.

To say that there is no Nibbāna simply because those filled with greed, anger and delusion, do not perceive it, is just as illogical as to say that there is no light because

the blind man does not see it, or because we cannot see the sun when clouds are hindering our sight.

But for an untrained worldling it is very difficult to get a right understanding of Nibbāna. Just as a fire in a house may be hidden to our eyes, but as soon as we go there it becomes visible, in the same way Nibbāna, which to the common man is hidden, becomes visible as soon as we reach it.

Also just as the Dhamma, the Cosmic Law, is independent of our knowledge, so is Nibbāna independent of our realisation of it.

Not by reasoning and abstract thinking can Nibbāna ever be attained, but only by right understanding, by inward purification, inward conquest and by fulfilling the "Holy Eightfold Path" founded on Anattasaññā, i.e., the perception that all things are without an Ego or self and that also behind all these phenomena of existence there is no "I," no eternal, immutable, unchanging entity, a "thing in itself."

There is only a five-khandha process of existence which comes to a stand-still at the death of the Arahāt or Holy One.

One never knows a thing as it really is without seeing it, and this, more than anywhere else, is true with regard to Nibbāna.

Although Nibbāna is hidden to the eyes of the worldling, the Path, however, leading there is attained by the noble disciple and is explained by the Buddha with all necessary details and everyone can follow it.

Where is Nibbāna?

Nāgasena gives the answer in "Milinda-Panha": "There is no place in the east or west, in the north or south, above, below, beyond, where Nibbāna can be found and yet

Nibbāna is, only he who is perfect in Sīla, Samādhi and Paññā has realized Nibbāna wherever he may be."

Everyone should lay the foundation for the attainment of Nibbāna here in this present existence. The Blessed One could not have entered the Path to Nibbāna whilst living in the Tusita Heaven, the heaven of bliss. He had to be reborn amongst men in order to enter the Path to Nibbāna.

It is my firm belief that our striving for Nibbāna should begin here in this very life, and that all others who believe that a later existence would give more and better opportunities for reaching Nibbāna are mistaken, are in error.

Not in heaven, but here on earth, where there is abundant resistance and opposition, seems to me to be the only possibility for a quick progress. It is our earth that provides best opportunities for it.

For a Buddhist, birth as a human being seems to me the more suitable of all births in the sensuous realm. Only as man can one succeed in the struggle against greed, anger and delusion, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair.

Hence as men we have it in our power so to train the mind that, through thinking and reflecting, we may advance from mere theory to true intuition or insight. This is a natural development of mind, its ultimate phase.

Besides, it is through intuition that thinkers have made their greatest discoveries. Thus after a prolonged mental strain in one direction, the mind suddenly sees the universe face to face.

It is thus that the Buddha describes the attainment of His own Enlightenment, and it is thus that we also, with unshackled intent, shall attain to the same goal.

Thus the other shore, Nibbāna, will have been realized, the raft whereon we crossed the ocean of Samsāra will have been thrown aside, and we will have attained the end of all existence and suffering.

In practising samādhi (mental concentration) the noble disciple experiences, step by step, first the suspension of all sense impressions, and finally at the end the suspension of all consciousness and feeling.

He feels that he might attain the power to decide whether a mental object should arise or not arise, be or not be. He develops mental concentration to the highest state of perfection: the temporal extinction of consciousness and feeling called: "Niroda samāpatti." This state of concentration cannot be transcended by any other state of Samādhi. All states of mental concentration are the foundation to peace, happiness, insight, and all are leading to rebirth in higher states, amongst men, or higher heavenly beings.

After rising from the jhāna, whilst breaking through subconsciousness, attentiveness (āvajjana) arises on the threshold of consciousness for the purpose of retrospection regarding the trances.

Nirodhasamāpatti is an unconscious state, a reality, in which a Yogi is said to be able to remain for seven days just as in the jhānas. It is said to differ from death in its being merely the suspension of breathing, verbal and mental functions (kāya-vacī and cittasankhāra), whilst death puts an end also to life and warmth (āyu and usmā).

The Yogi who has mastered the state of extinction of consciousness and feeling, may, after rising from this state, through deep insight, eventually attain Nibbāna.

The unlearned worldling may think that Nibbāna is a state of nothingness. But for the mere reason that one

cannot conceive it with one's worldly knowledge, to prove that Nibbāna is nothingness, is just as illogical as for the blind man to conclude that there is no light.

There really does exist a state known by the name of *Ākiñcaññāyatanaṃ* or "Sphere of Nothingness." But this is really not nothingness but a state of sublimated consciousness.

Nibbāna may be compared with that sublime state of Peace, called *Saññāvedayitanirodha* or "suspension of consciousness and feeling," where breathing, verbal and mental functions have ceased. But also this state is temporary whilst Nibbāna is beyond time.

Well, one may ask: "How can that state be called happiness when there is no feeling?" The Buddha would reply: "Just because there is no feeling whatever, just therefore it is the highest happiness."

What will happen to the Arahāt after his attaining final extinction of existence? The Buddha says: "As a flame blown out by the wind cannot be recognised anywhere, even so when an Arahāt has disappeared he cannot be recognised anywhere. When all things are extinguished all subjects for discussion are cut off".

"Now"—says Ven. Nyanatiloka—"this fact that after the death of the Arahāt, the Holy One, this psycho-physical life process no longer continues, is by many erroneously believed to be identical with the annihilation of a self, the annihilation of a real being and it is therefore maintained that the goal of Buddhism is simply annihilation.

"Against such a misleading statement that Nibbāna is annihilation I must enter an emphatic protest. How is it ever possible to speak of the annihilation of a self, or soul, or Ego, where no such thing as an Ego is to be found?

“We have seen that in reality there does not exist any Ego-entity or Soul, and that therefore also no transmigration of the same into a new mother’s womb takes place. That bodily process starting anew in the mother’s womb is in no way a continuation of the former bodily process but merely a result or effect caused by the selfish craving and clinging to life, of the so-called individual who has died. In Nid. Samy. No. 59 it is said: “Once all ignorance and clinging are extinguished neither karmically meritorious nor demeritorious, nor imperturbable karma-formations are produced, and thus no consciousness will spring up again in a new mother’s womb.”

“Therefore, he who says that the non-production of this new life-process is identical with annihilation of a Self, also should say that abstention from sexual intercourse is identical with the annihilation of the child—which of course is absurd.

“Here I feel the necessity of once more expressly emphasizing the fact that without a clear perception of the phenomenality, or Egolessness of all existence, a real understanding of the Buddha’s teaching, especially that of rebirth and Nibbāna, is impossible.

“This doctrine of Anatta is in fact the only specific teaching of Buddhism with which the entire teaching stands or falls.”

One cannot say that the Arahāt is reborn, because all craving and clinging to existence are completely abandoned, rooted out, like a palm tree torn out of the soil, destroyed and not liable to spring up again in future.

“Neither can one say that the Arahāt is annihilated at death as there is nothing to be annihilated. What we call “Arahāt” is, as we have seen, only a convenient term of speech and has no real existence. There is only a process

of bodily and mental phenomena which have come to a standstill and is not continued after death."

The Buddha says: "Develop your concentration, for he who has concentration understands things according to their reality. And what are these things? The arising and passing away of bodily form, feeling, perception, mental-formations and consciousness. Thus the five groups of Existence must be wisely penetrated, delusion and craving wisely abandoned, tranquillity and insight wisely developed."

"But whatever there is of bodily form, feeling, perception, mental-formations and consciousness—all these phenomena he regards as "impermanent", subject to pain, "as infirm, as an ulcer, a thorn, a misery, a burden, an enemy, a disturbance, as empty and "void of an Ego," and turning away from these things, he directs his mind towards the abiding, thus: "This verily, is the peace, this is the Highest, namely: the end of all formations, the forsaking of every substratum of rebirth, the fading away of craving, detachment, extinction, this is Nibbāna. And in this state he reaches the "cessation of passions." And his heart becomes free from sensual passion, free from the passion for existence, free from the passion of ignorance.

"Freed am I"—this knowledge arises in the liberated one and he knows: Exhausted is rebirth, fulfilled the Holy Life ; what was to be done has been done: naught remains to be done.

"For ever I am liberated,
This is the last time that I'm born,
No new existence waits for me."

"This, verily, is the highest, holiest wisdom to know that all suffering has passed away.

"This, verily, is the highest, holiest peace: appeasement of greed, anger and delusion.

"I am," is a vain thought, "I am not", is a vain thought, "I shall be," is a vain thought, "I shall not be," is a vain thought. Vain thoughts are a sickness, an ulcer, a thorn. But after overcoming all vain thoughts, one is called a silent thinker. And the thinker, the silent one, does no more arise, no more pass away, no more tremble, no more desire. For there is nothing left in him that he should arise again. And as he arises no more, how should he grow old again? And as he does not grow old anymore, how should he die again? And as he dies no more, how should he tremble? And as he trembles no more, how should he have desire?

"Hence, the purpose of the Holy Life does not consist in acquiring alms, honour, or fame, no gaining morality concentration, or the eye of knowledge. That unshakable deliverance of the heart: that, verily, is the object of the Holy Life, that is the essence, that is its goal.

"And those who formerly, in the past, were Holy and Enlightened Ones, also those Blessed Ones have pointed out to their disciples this self-same goal, as has been pointed out by me to my disciples. And those who afterwards, in the future, will be Holy and Enlightened Ones, those Blessed Ones also will point out to their disciples this self-same goal as has been pointed out by me to my disciples.

"However, disciples, it may be that after my passing away you might think: Gone is the doctrine of our Master. We have no Master more. But thus you should not think; for the Law (Dhamma) and the Discipline (Vinaya), which I have taught you will, after my death, be your master.

The Law be your Light,

The Law be your refuge!

Do not look for any other refuge!"

Whether Perfect Ones (Buddhas) appear in the world or whether Perfect Ones do not appear in the world, it still

remains a firm condition, an immutable fact and fixed law that all formations are "impermanent", that all formations are "subject to suffering", that everything is "without an Ego."

"Therefore, Disciples, the doctrines which I advised you to penetrate, you should well preserve, well guard, so that this Holy Life may take its course and continue for ages, for the weal and welfare of the many, as a consolation to the world, for the happiness, weal and welfare of heavenly beings and men."

Thus, the problem of Nibbāna is an ethical rather than a philosophical one, and its solution is dependent not upon dialectical skill but upon right understanding, upon inward purification, inward conquest and fulfilling the "Holy Eightfold Path" founded on Anatta-saññā, the perception that all things created as well as uncreated are without an Ego, and that also behind all these phenomena of existence there is no I, no eternal, immutable unchangeable entity, or a thing in itself.

In face of such a path, all language is weak and besides the great example of the Master, no feeble words of mine can describe it.

The way is ever open for him who will walk on it, and when we have become as gentle, as pure, as wise, as compassionate, and as perfectly self-controlled as was the Holy One, the Perfect One, then shall we know, then shall we understand: —

*Dukkham-eva hi na koci dukkhito,
Kārako na, Kiriyā va vijjati,
Atthi nibbuti, na nibbuto pumā,
Maggam-atthi, gāmakko na vijjati.*

